Conference of Chief Ministers

1666. SHRI RAJKUMAR DHOOT: Will the Minister of PANCHAYATI RAJ be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that a Conference of Chief Ministers on Poverty Alleviation and Prosperity through Panchayati Raj was held in June, 2004;

(b) if so, the conclusion arrived at the Conference; and

(c) the latest status on the action taken by Government on the decisions taken in the Conference?

THE MINISTER OF PANCHAYATI RAJ (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) and (b) A Conference of Chief Ministers and State Ministers in charge of Rural Development & Panchayati Raj on Poverty Alleviation and Rural Prosperity through Panchayati Raj was organized in New Delhi on 29-30 June, 2004 jointly by the Ministry of Rural Development and Ministry of Panchayati Raj. Prime Minister in his inaugural address at this Conference emphasized the need to strengthen Panchayati Raj for achieving rural prosperity. He also mooted the idea of Rural Business Hubs that add value to agricultural produce in the rural areas. The Conference decided to hold seven Round Tables of State Ministers of Panchayati Raj to formulate a draft action plan for achieving the objectives of strengthening of Panchayati Raj Institutions, so as to enable them to become true institutions of self-government for planning and implementation of programmes of economic development and social justice as envisioned in Part IX of the Constitution.

(c) A joint programme of action consisting of about 150 recommendations concerning 18 dimensions of Panchayati Raj has been chalked at the seven Round Tables held between July and December, 2004. These include that on the basis of Activity Mapping undertaken by State Panchayats at various levels are devolved with funds, functions and functionaries to enable them to emerge as institutions of self-government. Recommendations also cover to institutionalizing social audit measures through Gram Sabhas so that Gram Panchayats are made responsible to the Village Community as a whole. A compendium of these 150 points has been circulated for information to all Members of Parliament.

In furtherance of the recommendations of the Round Tables, the Minister of Panchayati Raj has now initiated a process of visiting each of the States/UTs to review with the authorities concerned the progress in implementing the points for action contained in the compendium as also to arrive at a State specific Statement elaborately on the steps for reforms as pertains to the State concerned. A Committee of Chief Secretaries of States and State Panchayati Raj Secretaries has been constituted under the Chairmanship of the Secretary (Panchayati Raj) to monitor the progress on the implementation of the 150 recommendations of the Seven Round Tables. Two review meetings of the Committee have so far been held on the 11th April, 2005 and the 29th June, 2005. A Council of Ministers of Panchayati Raj of States/ Union Territories has been constituted under the Chairmanship of the Minister of Panchayati Raj, Government of India. The inaugural meeting of the Council, which is on the subject of activity mapping has been held on the 5th-6th August, 2005 at Kochi. It is expected that these efforts will accelerate the pace of implementation of provisions of Part IX, read with Article 243ZD of the Constitution, and thus bring about greater conformity, in both letter and spirit, in all States/UTs to the Constitutional provisions of Panchayati Raj.

The Ministry of Panchayati Raj has been engaged in consultation with various experts in order to devise an appropriate framework for Panchayats to facilitate the setting up of the Rural business Hubs. In November, 2004, National Presentation on Rural Business Hubs was organised jointly by Ministry of Panchayati Raj and Confederation of Indian Industry in which several Government agencies such as IT, Financial Institutions including NABARD and institutions dealing with Textiles,

Handicrafts and Agro Business participated. About 1000 elected representatives of Gram Panchayats, Block Panchayats and Zilla Panchayats from various States/UTs also participated along with about 250 representatives of industry. The Ministry of Panchayati Raj and the CII are now working together to facilitate public-private-panchayat partnership to establish rural business hubs. For this purpose, a Rural Business Council Co-chaired by the Minister of Panchayati Raj and Shri S.K. Munjal, former Chairman of CII has been set up. The first Meeting of the Council was held on the 29th July, 2005.